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METHOD, CONTROL UNIT, AND COMPUTER PROGRAM FOR DETECTING
DEFECTIVE PRESSURE SENSORS IN AN INTERNAL COMBUSTION ENGINE

Background Information

The present invention relates to a method, a control unit, and
a computer program for detecting a defective intake-manifold
pressure sensor and/or a defective ambient-pressure sensor in
5 an internal combustion engine.

An intake-manifold pressure sensor is used, for example, to
diagnose the exhaust-gas recirculation in an internal
combustion engine and therefore supplies important information
for a control unit to control the internal combustion engine.
10 A load signal representing the current load of the internal
combustion engine, or the setting of a correct torque selected
by the driver, may be derived from the pressure in the intake
manifold. In addition, an optimum injection time in an
internal combustion engine having throttle control may be
15 ascertained from the load signal.

Because of the described, high importance of the intake-
manifold pressure sensor during the operation of an internal
combustion engine, it is desirable for defects in the intake-
manifold pressure sensor to be diagnosed early.

20 Diagnostic methods for detecting the defectiveness of intake-
manifold pressure sensors are already known from the related
art, but only in the case of conventional gasoline engines, in
particular spark-ignition engines. The conventional internal
combustion engines are distinguished in that their load
25 control is implemented via the throttle valve, where there is
a fixed relationship between the pressure in the intake

manifold and the load, or between the throttle-valve angle and the load.

An example of such a diagnostic method for conventional spark-ignition engines is known from, e.g. DE 199 46 874 A1. Here,
5 three different signals L1, L2, and L3 are produced from different operating parameters, L1 representing the mass flow rate of air that flows into an intake manifold of the spark-ignition engine, L2 representing the pressure in the intake manifold, and L3 representing a fuel signal ascertained from
10 the mass flow rate of fuel. These signals are compared to each other in pairs and united to form combinations when variations occur. Different combinations of deviations are assigned different causes, i.e. different sources of error, for the deviations. Thus, e.g. in a first part of the method, it can
15 initially be deduced that, when a particular deviation is present, either the intake-manifold pressure sensor and/or the exhaust-gas recirculation valve is defective. In a further part of the method, it may then be determined more accurately if the intake-manifold pressure sensor or the exhaust valve is
20 defective. To this end, the pressure in the intake manifold during both the operation of the engine and its stoppage is measured and evaluated during the post-operation of the corresponding engine control unit. If the intake-manifold pressure is the same in both cases, it may be deduced that
25 there is a defect in the intake-manifold pressure sensor; however, if the pressure in the intake manifold while the engine is stopped is less than that when the engine is being operated, it may then be deduced that an exhaust-gas recirculation valve is defective.

30 In addition, ambient-pressure sensors for use in internal combustion engines are known in the related art. In addition to the intake-manifold pressure sensors, they also supply important information for a control unit to control an

internal combustion engine. Ambient-pressure sensors are used for, inter alia, ascertaining the maximum torque of the internal combustion engine. Diagnostic methods for ambient-pressure sensors are also known in the related art. In

5 conventional gasoline engines in which the load is controlled via the throttle valve, an ambient-pressure sensor can, however, only be checked for its correct method of functioning, i.e. plausibility-checked, while starting or during full load, since in conventional gasoline engines, a
10 pressure that approaches ambient pressure is only present in the intake manifold under these conditions.

However, in internal combustion engines having variable valve timing, i.e. in internal combustion engines having
throttleless load control, the load of the internal combustion
15 engine is no longer controlled via the throttle valve and, therefore, via the pressure in the intake manifold, but rather via a change in its valve timing and/or its valve lift. The internal combustion engines having fully variable valve timing are distinguished by a lower fuel consumption than
20 conventional gasoline engines.

Fig. 3 schematically illustrates such an internal combustion engine 100 having variable valve timing. Internal combustion engine 100 includes an engine block 110 having a piston 112, which moves up and down in it. Connected to the engine block
25 is an intake manifold 120 having a built-in throttle valve 122 and an exhaust pipe 130. However, in contrast to conventional spark-ignition engines, throttle valve 122 is not used for controlling load. The control of the air supply and air exhaust through the intake manifold and the exhaust pipe, and
30 therefore the control of the load of the internal combustion engine, is carried out via valves 140, which are controlled by a control unit 200, the control being implemented with the aid of fully variable timing edges. Instead of a single control

unit 200, several control units interconnected by any communication link may also be used for controlling valves 140. The valves may be moved, for example, by electromagnetic or electrohydraulic actuators.

5 Control unit 200 includes an ambient-pressure sensor 210 for supplying a throttle-valve pressure signal, which represents pressure $p_{\text{before_DK}}$ upstream from throttle valve 122. In this context, ambient-pressure sensor 210 does not directly supply pressure $p_{\text{before_DK}}$, but it primarily supplies only the
10 ambient pressure, i.e. the air pressure upstream from air filter 150 of the internal combustion engine. Then, actual pressure $p_{\text{before_DK}}$ upstream from the throttle valve may be subsequently derived in either ambient-pressure sensor 210 itself or control unit 200, by subtracting a pressure drop
15 occurring in air filter 150 of the internal combustion engine from the measured ambient pressure.

In throttleless operation of the internal combustion engine, the pressure upstream from the throttle valve must be equal to the pressure in the intake manifold. An intake-manifold
20 pressure sensor 220 is typically provided in the case of the control units of the related art. Intake-manifold pressure sensor 220 provides an intake-manifold pressure signal, which represents pressure p_{intake} in intake manifold 120 of internal combustion engine 100. Sometimes, they are
25 additionally provided with an ambient-pressure sensor 210.

However, as just explained, since the load control in internal combustion engines having fully variable valve timing is no longer implemented via the throttle valve, all of the already known diagnostic methods for pressure sensors, which are based
30 on deriving a load signal representing the load of the internal combustion engine from the angular position of the throttle valve or the pressure in the intake manifold, are no

longer applicable to internal combustion engines having fully variable valve timing.

Therefore, on the basis of the mentioned related art, the object of the present invention is to further develop a known
5 method, a known control unit, and a known computer program for detecting a defective intake-manifold pressure sensor and/or a defective ambient-pressure sensor in a conventional internal combustion engine in such a manner, that this detection is also possible in internal combustion engines having fully
10 variable valve timing.

This object is achieved by the method claimed in Claim 1. In contrast to the related art, the claimed method dispenses with deriving load signals from the position of the throttle valve or from the intake-manifold pressure for detecting if at least
15 one of two pressure sensors, namely the intake-manifold pressure sensor or the ambient-pressure sensor, is defective. Instead, the method of the present invention allows this detection to take place exclusively on the basis of a direct evaluation of the pressure upstream from the throttle valve
20 and the pressure in the intake manifold.

According to a preferred, advantageous refinement, the claimed method includes further steps, in order to be able to determine which of the two pressure sensors is defective. To this end, the internal combustion engine having throttleless
25 load control is artificially shifted into an operating state, which simulates throttled load control. In the scope of this simulation, it is also possible to then derive simulated load signals from both the pressure in the intake manifold and the angular position of the throttle valve. According to the
30 present invention, the simulated load signals are used for identifying the pressure sensor that is actually defective.

The above-mentioned object of the present invention is also achieved by the control unit claimed in Claim 6 and the computer program claimed in Claim 13.

5 The advantages of the control unit and the computer program essentially correspond to the above-mentioned advantages with regard to the claimed method.

Further advantageous refinements of the claimed method, the control unit, and the computer program are subject matter of the dependent claims.

10 Preferred exemplary embodiments of the present invention are subsequently explained in detail in light of the attached figures. The figures show:

Fig. 1a a method of the present invention for detecting defective pressure sensors in an internal combustion engine and a first logic module provided for
15 implementing the method;

Fig. 1b a control unit of the present invention;

Fig. 2 A further refinement of the method according to the present invention and a second logic module provided
20 for implementing the further refinement; and

Fig. 3 a known internal combustion engine having variable valve timing, and a corresponding, known control unit for controlling the valves.

25 Fig. 1a illustrates a method for determining whether or not at least one of two pressure sensors, namely the intake-manifold pressure sensor and/or the ambient-pressure sensor is defective in the case of an internal combustion engine having variable valve timing in accordance with Fig. 3. The method

according to Fig. 1a does not yet allow one to specifically determine which of the two pressure sensors is defective; such a determination may only be made with the aid of the further refinement of the method described below with reference to Fig. 2.

The method is illustrated in Fig. 1a by showing the functional layout of a first logic module 240 according to the present invention, which is preferably a component of a control unit 200 for controlling the valves of internal combustion engine 100, see Fig. 1b. First logic module 240 allows the claimed method to be implemented. The layout of first logic module 240 is described below in detail; the individual steps of the claimed method are also automatically deduced from this.

According to Fig. 1a, first logic module 240 receives both a throttle-valve pressure signal, which represents pressure $p_{\text{before_DK}}$, and an intake-manifold pressure signal, which represents pressure p_{intake} in the intake manifold of the internal combustion engine; in order to generate these signals: see Fig. 3 and the corresponding part of the description. According to the present invention, first logic module 240 also receives a first status signal from a first operating-state detector 230, the first status signal indicating whether or not the internal combustion engine is being operated in a throttleless operating state. As an alternative, the status signal may also be generated by another logic module inside control unit 200.

As shown in Fig. 1a, logic module 240 includes a first subtraction unit 242 for calculating a pressure difference Δp by subtraction of the intake-manifold pressure signal from the throttle-valve pressure signal. This pressure difference is supplied to a first comparator unit 244, which determines if pressure difference Δp is greater than a

first threshold value Delta_P1. A first AND gate 246 ANDs the logical output signal of first comparator unit 244 and the first status signal. The output signal of this first AND gate 246 makes a first statement as to whether or not one of
5 pressure sensors 210, 220 is defective; this is exactly the case, when pressure difference delta_p is actually greater than first threshold value Delta_P1 and internal combustion engine 100 is simultaneously being operated in a throttleless manner, as indicated by the first status signal. In this
10 context, first threshold value Delta_P1 is preferably set to approximately zero.

Irrespective of this first statement, first logic module 240 includes a second comparator unit 248 for determining if pressure difference delta_p is less than second threshold
15 value Delta_P2, where Delta_P2 is preferably zero. When this is the case, then, independently of the first statement, it is possible to make a second statement that one of the two pressure sensors 210, 220 is operating incorrectly. This statement is physically based on the fact that the pressure in
20 intake manifold 120 can never be greater than the pressure upstream from throttle valve 122.

First logic module 240 also includes an OR gate 249 for ORing the output signal of first AND gate 246 and the output signal of second comparator unit 248. This OR operation is used for
25 generating a first error signal E_DS_DSU, which represents an error in one of the two pressure sensors 210, 220, when such an error has already been detected at either the output of first AND gate 246 or at the output of second comparator unit 248 or at both outputs.

30 Fig. 2 illustrates a further refinement of the method represented in Fig. 1, this further refinement being used to allow an exact determination as to whether the intake-manifold

pressure sensor or ambient-pressure sensor 210 is defective. This further refinement is implemented in the form of a second logic module 250, which is preferably assigned to control unit 200 as well, see Fig. 1b.

5 According to Figures 1b and 2, second logic module 250 implements the above-mentioned further refinement of the method by logically combining first error signal ES_DS_DSU, a first load signal load_from_intake-manifold-pressure, which represents the load of the internal combustion engine derived
10 from the pressure in the intake manifold, and a second load signal load_from_DK, which represents the load of the internal combustion engine derived from the angular position of throttle valve 122.

To implement the further refinement of the method, an
15 operating state that includes throttled load control is simulated in the internal combustion engine 100 having absolutely variable valve timing. To this end, valves 140 are preferably controlled by control unit 200, using fixed timing edges. This special operating state is represented by a second
20 status signal B_DK_occurred, which is likewise supplied to second logic module 250 as an input variable.

Second logic module 250 includes a second subtraction unit 251 for calculating a load difference by subtraction of the second load signal from the first load signal. An absolute-value
25 generator 252 calculates the absolute value of the load difference before this is supplied to a third comparator unit 253. Third comparator unit 253 determines if the absolute value of the load difference is greater than a third threshold value Delta_load.

30 A second AND gate 254 ANDs first error signal E_DS_DSU and second status signal B_DK_occurred. The output signal of second AND gate 254 is transmitted, together with the output

signal of third comparator unit 253, to a third AND gate 255, which means that the output signal of third AND gate 255 represents the result of ANDing the mentioned, inputted signals. In other words: the output signal of third AND gate 255 represents a second error signal E_DS_intake, i.e. it indicates, if applicable, the defectiveness of intake-manifold pressure sensor 220. Such defectiveness is present, when the absolute value of the difference of the load of the internal combustion engine derived from the pressure in the intake manifold and the load derived from the angle of the throttle valve is greater than third threshold value Δ_{load} , and when, in addition, the presence of a defect in at least one of the pressure sensors, ambient-pressure sensor 210 or intake-manifold pressure sensor 220, was simultaneously detected in the preliminary procedure described above with reference to Fig. 1a, and when an operation that includes throttled load control was simulated in internal combustion engine 100. The conclusion that the intake-manifold pressure sensor is defective is valid, since signal $load_from_DK$ is reliably monitored by other diagnoses and is therefore correct.

Second logic module 250 further includes a fourth AND gate 256 for ANDing the output signal of comparator unit 253 inverted by an inverter 257 and the output signal of second AND gate 254. The output signal of fourth AND gate 256 represents a third error signal E_DS_Umg, which indicates, if applicable, a defect in ambient-pressure sensor 210. Such a defect is present, when the absolute value of the difference of the load of the internal combustion engine derived from the pressure in the intake manifold and the load derived from the angular position of the throttle valve is less than or equal to third threshold value Δ_{load} , and, at the same time, a defect in at least one of pressure sensors 210, 220 was already absolutely detected in the preliminary procedure described

above with reference to Fig. 1, and an operation that includes throttled load control was simulated in the internal combustion engine.

Both the first and second logic modules may each be
5 implemented independently of each other in the form of a hardware circuit.

However, it is particularly important to implement the method of the present invention, and therefore to implement first and/or second logic module 240, 250, in the form of a computer
10 program. In this context, the computer program is executable on a computing element, particularly on a microprocessor in control unit 200, and is suitable for carrying out the method of the present invention. In this case, the present invention is therefore implemented by the computer program, so that this
15 computer program represents the present invention in the same manner as the method, for whose execution the computer program is suitable. The computer program is preferably stored in a memory element. In particular, an electrical storage medium, e.g. a random-access memory RAM, a read-only memory ROM, or a
20 flash memory, may be used as the memory element.